

VOLCANIC TRAIL MASTERPLAN

NOTES & OBSERVATIONS FROM SITE VISITS

Date: 21.08.2020

WANNON FALLS

- The site is easy to access, being only a 15-minute drive from Hamilton and the lookout which provides views of the falls is accessible to people of all abilities.
- The site is clearly signposted from the main highway, with substantial stone & steel entry gates, although there is some confusion between the turnoff to the alternative (Thomas Clarke) viewing area and the main entry.
- It is already established as a destination, but there needs to be additional opportunities to increase the time that visitors spend on the site, such as longer walks.
- It would be good to cater more for the independent / self-guided traveler, with physical signage plus digital resources. Improving Wi-Fi access would support this.
- The falls have been painted by a number of well-known Colonial artists (Louis Bouvelot and Eugene Von Guerard) who are represented in the Hamilton Gallery collection, so there is an opportunity to link to this, perhaps with an 'art walk'.
- Interpretations focus on geological history, there is a lack of knowledge about indigenous history and connection to the site.
- Other potential tourism linkages include the Hamilton – Coleraine Rail Trail, tourists that travel through Coleraine and partnerships with licensed tour operators (LTOs) who could bring coaches from Melbourne on a loop along Great Ocean Rd / Southern Grampians / Grampians and return).
- There are strong connections and a sense of ownership over the site by various local groups as well as a history of tension between them, with some wanting to preserve the site for its environmental values while others are more focused on recreation.

Lower Carpark / Lookout

- Most infrastructure (lookout, toilets & signage) dates from 1990s and is in need of upgrade or replacement.
- The lookout floor surface (treated pine boards) has been covered in chicken wire, as it became dangerously slippery.
- Toilets are not fully compliant with current accessibility standards.
- There are issues with runoff from the bitumen carpark causing erosion.
- The Rotunda is currently used as a shelter for interpretations, but doesn't function well for this purpose, with steep steps up to a raised floor and a small internal floor area. Architecturally, the building doesn't relate well to the site and its presence detracts from the qualities of the natural environment.
- There are paths that lead from this carpark to the Thomas Clark Viewing area and to the opposite side of the river, but these are not clearly marked and are not well known.
- Selective pruning / tree removal could open up better views of the falls from the carpark.



Lower Carpark, view to rotunda & sign / shelter



Lower Carpark, path to picnic shelter



Lower Carpark, Toilets



Lower Carpark, signboard



View of falls from lookout



Path to lookout

WANNON FALLS

Upper Carpark / Campground

- This is an attractive bushland camp ground that is free and popular amongst backpackers and also seniors with RVs.
- The infrastructure and signage are very piecemeal and lack any overall planning or direction.
- Local friends groups are concerned about bushfire risk from campfires and do a lot of informal checking and maintenance of the site.
- When providing fireplaces, there is a need to manage risk and also potential damage from collection of firewood, similar to national parks.
- The toilet facilities duplicate those at the lower car park. They are the same age and are also in need of upgrade.
- The picnic shelter with large built in fireplace is in good condition and works quite well, but other infrastructure appears completely unrelated to this.
- The site is one of the best places for tourists to go for picnics in the shire at the moment, but could be greatly improved with better planning and facilities.
- The oval opposite the campground is used by locals for group recreation / events. There are significant colonies of indigenous grass species on the oval and it is also a common place to see kangaroos grazing.

Thomas Clark Viewing Area

- There is currently only a car park at this site, with no other facilities.
- There is no explanation of the significance of this site or the reason for its name (who was Thomas Clark?)
- There is no way finding signage to connect back to the main Wannon site, tourists who turn off the highway to stop at this area often confuse it with the main area. The walking path back to the lookout is not marked.
- The view back to the falls is quite picturesque and there is an opportunity to provide a lookout / viewing platform that could be used by artists, with interpretations linking to the Hamilton Gallery collection.
- The lack of existing infrastructure is an advantage – the site is a blank slate and provides an opportunity for a more sensitive development.



Upper Carpark, picnic shelter



Campground & picnic area



Upper Carpark, signboard



Oval



Thomas Clark Viewing Area



View of falls from Thomas Clark Viewing Area

NIGRETTA FALLS

Lookout / Carpark

- Like Wannon Falls, this site is also easy to access from Hamilton and is an established destination for locals and tourists. It can be visited as a continuation of a visit to the Wannon, being only 9km further northeast and is clearly signposted from the main highway, opposite the Wannon Falls entrance. There are also signs along the Nigretta Rd.
- It also has the potential to cater for visitors of all abilities, with the lookout within easy reach of the carpark, but could be improved by providing opportunities for longer walks and exploration beyond the lookout.
- The visitor experience at this site is currently dominated by vehicle access, with a large sealed loop road and carparking area adjacent the lookout.
- There is a strong need to better manage and control vehicles to prevent them driving off-road, directly down to the riverside and onto grassed areas / picnic grounds.
- The carpark is immediately adjacent the lookout, with no walking path or vegetation separating them. This detracts from the visitor experience, as there is very little sense of the site being revealed – it is all already visible from the carpark and the cars all remain visible while looking at the falls.
- The lookout is a similar age to that at the Wannon Falls and is also in need of upgrade. Views of the falls from the lookout are partially obscured by trees, and some selective pruning could improve view lines.
- Timber steps provide access to the base of the falls, these are starting to rot and are in need of upgrade. Compared to the more subtle style of path construction typical to national parks, the staircase structure is quite visually dominant on the slope. The access to these steps is via a poorly formed and not well marked path.
- The cyclone wire fences around the lookout and access to steps are out of place and detract from the qualities of the natural environment.
- There is a complete absence of interpretation at this site, with the exception of one sign about endemic flora that was installed by a local field naturalist group. There is also no knowledge of local indigenous history at the site.
- In addition to the lookout, there are toilet facilities and a picnic shelter / tables.
- The toilets are the same age and design as those at the Wannon falls and are in good working order, but dated and in need of upgrading.
- The picnic shelter and tables are located in the grassy 'island' in the centre of the loop road. They are quite exposed, with no views of the falls and not much connection to the surrounding native landscape, being encircled by the access road and adjacent a plantation of European trees.



Nigretta Falls in full flow (Oct 2020)



Lookout approach from main carpark



Top of stairs, flora & warning signage



Walking path from carpark to top of stairs



Toilets



Picnic shelter & lawn with European trees

NIGRETTA FALLS

Riverside

- There is a small lookout at the crest of the falls, accessed via a poorly formed and unmarked walking track. The construction of the lookout itself is very dated and not in keeping with the natural environment (such concrete poured onto natural rock surfaces, cyclone wire fencing).
- There is potential to develop a riverside walking trail, which takes visitors on a longer walk away from the carpark past the top of the falls to the eastern section of the river. The riverside offers attractive rural / bushland views across the river, with opportunities for bird-watching, picnics and a more immersive experience away from other infrastructure.
- There is a sealed road which provides access to the riverside area and terminates in a small carpark. Unfortunately, locals regularly drive off this track, causing significant erosion and degradation of the river bank.
- The local CFA use the river as a water point and truck access needs to be maintained for this in one location. Access for canoe launching is also needed and could be consolidated with CFA access point.
- Other than this designated point, vehicles need to be prevented from driving down to the river edge.
- Walking trail access to a small jetty for fishing and canoe launching could be provided, and the river banks repaired and revegetated.



Lookout at crest of falls



View from crest lookout down Wannon River



View of Wannon River above falls



Upper carpark / river access



Riverside swimming area



Informal vehicle tracks causing erosion

BYADUK CAVES

- This site is managed by Parks Victoria, however in reality, maintenance consists of little more than mowing twice a year.
- The site is signposted from the main Port Fairy Rd and is accessed via a dirt road that terminates in a small carpark.
- At the park entrance there is very little sense of arrival and while there is plenty of signage telling visitors all that they *can't* do (ie. rules and regulations) there is nothing to tell them what they *can* do (ie. Site introduction / map / activities available).
- There are a number of walking paths that consist of grassy tracks with stone edging. While they are fairly informal, this natural quality is quite attractive in the landscape and provides a contrast to the more developed sites. With some improvements to wayfinding, and maintenance of stone edges, this would be enough to direct visitors.
- The site is currently visited by school groups as well as independent travelers and has the potential to be further developed for educational purposes. It is suited to visitors who are able bodied, and are looking for extended walks and more immersive nature experiences.
- The caves are circular formations that are open from above and formal 'lookouts' have been located at the edge of many caves, marked with a wire fence about 1.4m high. These are not particularly successful – the fences are too high and singular viewing point they provide doesn't match the nature of the formations themselves. It is clear from the informal paths around the area that visitors have a desire to circumnavigate the cave openings in order to look down into them from multiple viewpoints.
- There is potential to provide safe access with a constructed path down into one of the caves, as an alternative way of experiencing them and to add to education opportunities. It would be important to leave other caves untouched.
- There are a lot of weeds and vegetation growing in the caves that obscure views.
- There is also some competition from surrounding farmland, which brings in weeds and undermines the visitor's sense immersion in the natural environment. Some revegetation along the boundaries would help to visually buffer from farmland and out-compete weed species.
- This site has some obvious similarities to the Budj Bim stone country and would be a natural tourism linkage point to the nearby Budj Bim World Heritage Landscape.
- There are also other potential linkages with other cave sites, such as the World Heritage Naracoorte Caves National Park, in southeast South Australia. It is noted that this is a very different type of caving experience to Narracoorte, and it is important to provide good information to visitors prior to their arrival at the site, so that they are not disappointed by the comparison.
- There is very limited phone coverage, which prevents visitors accessing digital information while at the site.
- A side path takes visitors to the site of an historic dry rock wall, adjoining a farm on the northern boundary of the park. It is a good example of this type of structure and provides an opportunity to discuss Colonial history, however the current interpretive sign is almost illegible and in need of replacement.
- Apart from this one sign, there are no other interpretations at the site.
- There is also no knowledge or recorded history of the traditional owners' connections to the site.



Carpark, looking down access road



Typical path, grass with stone edging



Harman Cave (Cave 1)



Typical cave lookout point (Bridge Cave)



Bridge Cave (Cave 4)



Dry stone wall

HARMANS VALLEY LOOKOUT

- The views down the valley are quite spectacular and provide a clear line of sight to the source of the lava flow, Mt Napier.
- Facilities include a small vehicle pullout and a series of interpretive signs, with a plantation of Allocasurinas providing a buffer to the main road.
- The current facilities are functionally adequate; however they are in need of upgrade with the road heavily potholed and signage not weathering well.



Approach from south, Port Fairy-Hamilton Rd



Roadside pullout and signage



View down Harmans Valley (to Mt Napier)



Typical signboard (one of three)

TUMULI

- There are currently no facilities at this site and no way finding to it from the main access point on the Port Fairy Road.
- The tumuli are located on a section of Crown land but also continue onto adjacent private farmland and the boundaries of the two parcels are not clearly defined. Visitors frequently wander onto farmland and conversely, cattle from the adjacent farm also graze the crown land.
- There is a section of dry stone wall on the boundary between the Tumuli site and adjoining farmland to the west.
- The tumuli site is managed by DELWP and SGSC are responsible for the road reserve.
- There is little maintenance currently undertaken and the site needs to have weeds removed.
- The site is located on a bend in Old Crusher Road and because there is no carparking, vehicles simply pull onto the verge. Ideally a small car park and a dropoff / turnaround area for coaches would be provided within the road reserve. Warning signage is also needed on the approach in both directions.
- The tumuli are an unusual formation in the landscape that require some explanation in order for visitors to appreciate what they are looking at. There is an opportunity to introduce visitors with an elevated, more distant view on approach along Old Crusher Road. This could be a first stopping point before arriving at the site itself for a close-up experience.
- There are no formal paths or interpretations currently and past tourism brochures have featured visitors climbing the tumuli. Consideration is needed as to whether this is appropriate and should still be encouraged.
- There is also no knowledge about indigenous history and connection to this site.



Entrance to Tumuli site



Current parking on roadside reserve



Dry stone wall on boundary with farmland



View south along east boundary fence



Tumuli



View from crest to tumuli in distance

MOUNT NAPIER

- The main access into Mt Napier State Park is on Menzels Rd, which is accessed via Murroa Lane and the Port Fairy Rd. The dirt access road is currently in poor condition and is accessible to 4WD vehicles only.
- As a state park, it has less restrictions on use than a National Park site, allowing visitors to bring dogs or horses into the park. It is also popular amongst trail bike riders and has potential to be a good site for mountain bikes also.
- The site is well-suited to visitors who and are willing to stay for a longer time and are looking for a more adventurous outdoor experience.
- There is limited mobile phone coverage.
- As with all the other Volcanic Trail sites, there is no knowledge of the traditional owner's history or connections to country.

Summit walk

- There is a small, unmarked carpark at the base of the summit walk. Although the start of the summit walk is signposted, there is no indication of the length of the walk or degree of difficulty.
- The walk is about a 2km round trip and meanders through bushland, before climbing the mountain with rewarding views along the way. There are two rest points along the path where simple bench seats have been provided.
- The summit has dramatic 360-degree views as well as interesting views into the crater.
- The only infrastructure on the summit is a surveyor's trig point and a plaque commemorating Major Mitchell, which is mounted on a large (damaged) concrete plinth. There are no interpretations provided or directional information to help orient the visitor within the landscape.
- It is also possible to walk around the crater rim, although this path is not well formed or marked.

Quarry site

- A former quarry site is located near to the base of the summit walk. This is currently undeveloped but is a large clear area that is relatively flat and has the potential to be used as a camp site.
- It could potentially cater for coach tour groups who need an overnight stay between the Great Ocean Road and Grampians or Budj Bim Landscape.
- Facilities could include a toilet, picnic tables, fireplaces and designated car parks and campsites, similar to what is provided in a national park.
- The cut away section of the quarry reveals the strata of scoria and is a potential attraction for educational user groups. Both Mt Napier and Mt Rouse have been used as study sites by university students studying geology.



Menzies Pit Rd access track



Summit walking track near base



Summit walking track, approaching summit



Trig point & plinth on summit



Crater, looking west



Former quarry site

MOUNT ROUSE

- Mt Rouse is located on the southern edge of Peshurst. This site is strategically important as an entry to the Volcanic Trail and has the potential to 'catch' visitors who are enroute from the Great Ocean Road to the Grampians.
- The site is easily accessible and has the potential to provide experiences for visitors with a range of abilities.
- There is currently no signage linking this site to other volcanic sites in the shire. There is also not a lot of directional signage from within the town or linkage signage to the Budj Bim World Heritage Landscape.
- Within Peshurst, the SGSC have established the 'Volcanoes Discovery Centre', a small museum / interpretive display that is staffed by volunteers. This can potentially complement and augment the interpretive information provided on the mountain.
- The main access to the reserve is via a sealed road to the south of Mt Rouse. The turnoff is clearly marked on the main road, but the park entry itself is marked by a decaying timber sign.
- There are 3 carparks within the reserve, one near the crater (which is below the summit), one just below the summit and one at the summit.
- A gravel walking track that starts from a gravel carpark on the northern side of the reserve is accessible from the town and forms a loop walk via the summit lookout and picnic ground.
- There is excellent phone coverage with telecommunications towers located on the summit.

Lower Carpark / Crater

- There is no signage to direct visitors to this carpark, and many would drive past it without realizing it is there.
- There is a single interpretative sign, the picnic tables are in disrepair and the area is not well used.
- The crater, which sits well below the summit, is quite picturesque and potentially more significant as a volcanic feature than the summit. It is accessible within about 100m of the car park, although there is no formed walking trail.
- One of the attractive qualities of the crater is that from within it, there are no views of surrounding farmland or other built forms, and it is possible to imagine a pre-Colonial landscape.
- There have been events held within the crater such as concerts in the past and the natural amphitheatre that it forms lends itself to this use.
- The crater fills with water depending on rainfall and is a grazing and watering site for kangaroos and wallabies.
- Some locals drive their vehicles off road and into the crater. This needs to be discouraged to prevent damage.



South entry



Lower carpark



Picnic tables & signage at Lower carpark



Informal path into crater



Adjacent quarry site



Summit walking track from township

MOUNT ROUSE

Upper Carpark / Picnic ground

- The sealed road up the southern face of the mountain is a scenic drive that offers good views to the west towards Mt Napier, providing an opportunity to make a visual link to another of the Volcanic Trail sites.
- The facilities at the picnic ground consist of a shelter with an electric BBQ and picnic table, a toilet and some bench seating. There are opportunities for attractive views to the north toward the Grampians and over Peshurst. These are partly obscured by trees and some selective pruning would open up these views.
- The facilities themselves are very aged and in need of upgrade. The location of the shelter itself dominates the view from the car park.
- There is a map provided that illustrates the loop walk and summit lookout but no other interpretations are provided at the site.
- The toilet is in good working order, although not fully compliant with current access standards and appears to have been retrofitted within what was formerly an information shelter. The original structure is of some architectural merit, with a concrete roof and bench seat that is an unusual feature, although it is not well sited within the existing car park.
- There is another opportunity to create a side walk up to a second high-point to the southeast of the car park (with an informal, unmarked track at the moment). This could be another picnic or viewing location, however without extensive pruning or providing an elevated platform the surrounding trees would limit views.

Summit Lookout

- From the small carpark, a recently installed aluminium-framed staircase provides pedestrian access to a lookout on the summit. The choice of bright aluminium means the staircase stands out against the natural landscape rather than recedes. Beside the lookout, there is also an older informal track leading to a bench seat.
- From the summit there are panoramic, 360-degree views of the surrounding rural landscape, including Peshurst, the Grampians, other volcanic sites and recently constructed wind farms to the southwest.
- The summit is also the site of a significant amount of telecommunications infrastructure, including towers and associated buildings, which unfortunately obstruct view lines and are dominate the site.
- It is difficult to screen these buildings without restricting views as they are so close to the lookout, however if visitors are being directed to this site then this issue needs to be addressed, as the current state of these buildings detracts from the quality of the experience.



Upper Carpark / Picnic ground



Upper carpark



Upper Carpark Picnic ground



Staircase to summit lookout



Telecommunications equipment on summit



View across Peshurst from summit lookout